



All arts and sciences, the more they are perfected, the more they issue in divinity, and coincide with it, and appear to be parts of it.

Jonathan Edwards

# Radical Christian Scholarship

An Alternative for the  
Christian Academic



# What is the goal of Christian learning and scholarship?

To be more like the resurrected Christ

To think more like Christ

To feel and desire more like Christ

To evaluate and assess more like Christ

To act more like Christ

And how does that happen?

Through union with Christ's death & resurrection:  
Worship and prayer, listening and reading,  
reflection and writing, and dialogue with others

## The Genius of Late Modernism

1) Posing as if it were unbiased and objective—based solely in rationality and empirical investigation (science); 2) basing its rationality and science on a naturalistic worldview; and 3) therefore, excluding reference to the supernatural in academic discourse, because it is unscientific.

The result has been the marginalization of distinctly religious perspectives in the academy



## The Achilles Heel of Late Modernism

It is based on a secular worldview, and just like all religions and life-philosophies, it holds assumptions about reality that cannot be proven to be true to those who do not already hold them

So fundamentally it actually operates just like a religious system—but *its proponents don't realize it*

## So, for Christians, Modernism has been a mixed blessing

On the one hand,

- ◉ Disciplinary specialization in this era has produced enormous knowledge

On the other hand,

- ◉ Without a supernatural order to provide the ultimate explanatory context of life on earth, disciplinary specialization has produced fragmented, disconnected bodies of knowledge
- ◉ And naturalism/secularism became increasingly confounded with good scholarship and disciplinary knowledge



# Christians in Late Modernity

All of us have grown up in a secular public world

Television, movies, and childhood education are largely secular

To get advanced degrees, Christians have had to learn their disciplines in an intellectual environment where their worldview assumptions were excluded

As a result, the Christian intellectual community has largely accepted the secular discourse rules for the various disciplines, with the partial exception of theology and philosophy

# The Influence of Late Modernism on Christian Scholarship



As a result, much well-meaning Christian scholarship in the Late Modern era has been compromised *implicitly* by assumptions alien to Christianity

- For example, most Christian scholars today adhere solely to Late Modern rules of discourse in their disciplinary work, and avoid explicit Christian discourse, like reference to the image of God, sin, or redemption
- This allows us to contribute to the modern form of the discipline, but only so long as we play by secular rules
- And then this secular version of the disciplines is taught to students at Christian colleges, often given the label “integration”



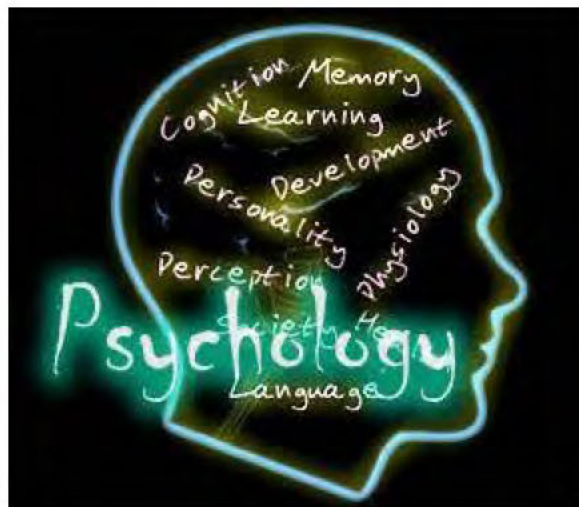
# The Influence of Late Modernism on Christian Scholarship



- Trained at secular institutions, many Christian scholars have assumed that the modern version of their discipline is basically correct. What is often lacking is a familiarity with the intellectual resources of the Faith, worldview awareness, and a Christian scholarly imagination.
- Given such assumptions, “Integration” is seen as an optional task, implicitly inferior to the *real* work of the discipline
- Then, the capstone “Integration” course at many Christian colleges is used to justify why deep and thorough integration didn’t actually occur in the major



The field of psychology is a paradigm example





## An Alternative Approach Suggested by Two Saints

- There are fundamentally Two Cities or Communities and the Christian scholar's community of identity is the City of God
- Two Cities leads to "Two Sciences," that is, there will be **two fundamentally different versions** of each of the human disciplines, with the X'n version based on divine regeneration





# Where the Challenge Really Lies

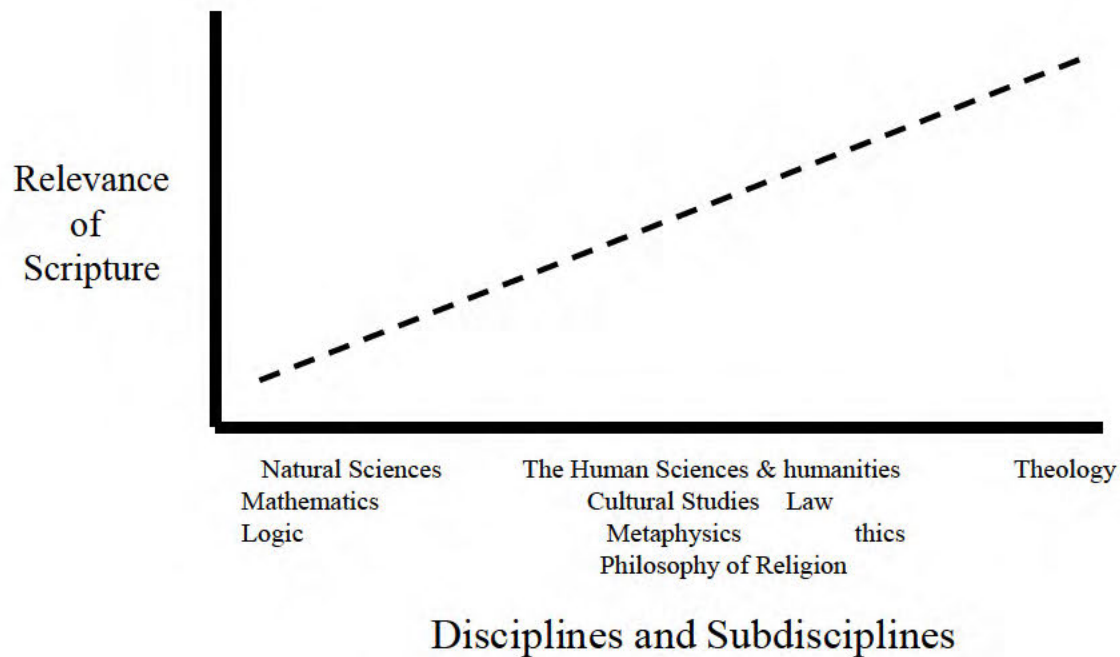
If Augustine and Kuyper are correct, the challenge of Christian scholarship is not simply the integration of Christian beliefs and the findings of one's discipline. The real challenge is communal, interpretive, and liturgical

- **Communal**, because allegiance to the City of God and its values has to take precedence over those of one's guild
- **Interpretive**, because each worldview community will inevitably interpret the world somewhat differently
- **Liturgical**, because every worldview community is living out its worship practices, one way or another





The degree to which Christian scholarship will be distinctive will depend on the discipline





# The Emergence of Radical Christian Scholarship

Over the past 20 years a small but growing consensus has emerged regarding a radical Christian alternative

Advocates include diverse scholars like Alvin Plantinga, Alisdair MacIntyre, James K. A. Smith, Oliver O'Donovan, Paul Moser, John Milbank, John Frame, Stanley Hauerwas, Gavin D'Costa, and Pope John Paul II





## What are the features of this minority consensus?

Christian scholarly discourse has some rules and assumptions that are not affirmed by scholars from other WV communities. For example,

- The reality of a personal God, appeal to the Bible and theology, the need for redemption, and the value of philosophy and history for all the disciplines
- The grounding of one's disciplinary activity on a biblical and Christian understanding of reality
- Christian disciplinary knowledge should be a synthesis of worship, knowledge, love, and ethicospiritual practices, as well as the legitimate knowledge and practices that constitute each discipline
- Distinctly Christian disciplinary knowledge will be a community product, necessarily synthesizing the activity of different kinds of scholars



# Pillars of Radical Christian Scholarship (RCS)

- RCS minimally assumes classic Christian orthodoxy
- As God's word, the Bible and biblical studies has a preeminent role to play in the development a Christian version of the disciplines.



- However, we must make one very important caveat about the use of the Bible

We need to interpret it in a valid way, understanding it according to God's communicative intentions—*and they are not always easy to determine*



# Pillars of Radical Christian Scholarship

- We must never forget that leading Christians in the 1500's rejected a heliocentric model of our planetary system, believing the Bible taught a geocentric system



- Lessons: While the Bible is inerrant, we have to take seriously the possibility that our interpretation of the Bible is errant regarding some matters (e.g., the age of earth)—so God's communicative intentions may differ from our expectations

# Pillars of Radical Christian Scholarship: Bible and theology



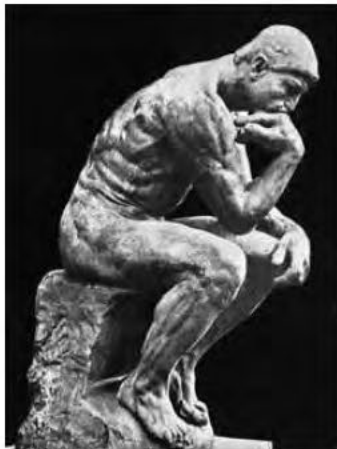
- Nevertheless, the Bible reveals to us many basic worldview truths necessary for all disciplines, as well as many truths about human beings and the created order that bear directly on the human sciences and humanities
- In addition, theological studies and classics from the Christian tradition are legitimate sources of knowledge for all disciplines, *insofar as they bear on a discipline*

***Reinvesting in these resources are most likely to inspire deeply and distinctly Christian disciplinary discourse***



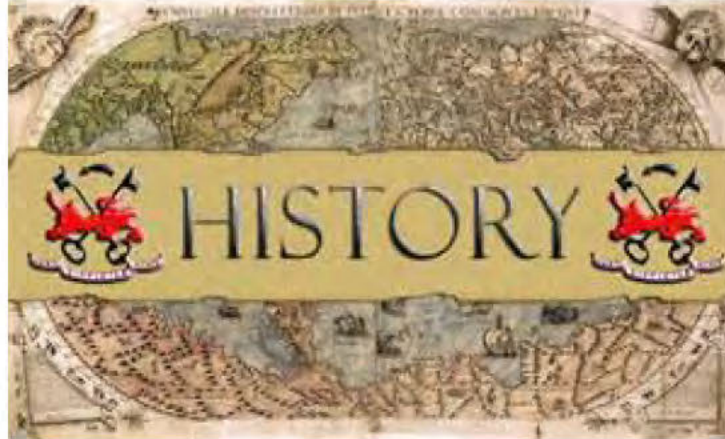
# Pillars of Radical Christian Scholarship: X'n Philosophy

- Philosophical studies will also contribute to the constitution of all disciplines, insofar as they help clarify the nature of the object, concepts, discourse, and activity of a discipline



# Pillars of Radical Christian Scholarship: History

- Some history will also be useful: the history of Christian thought, the history of modern thought, and the history of one's discipline





# Pillars of Radical Christian Scholarship: Spirituality

- Biblical/Christian spirituality is involved in all disciplines, in that they all tend towards the worship and love of God, the love of neighbor, and the care of creation



# Pillars of Radical Christian Scholarship

- So some disciplines will be considered *metadisciplines* in Christian thought:

Biblical studies and Theology

Philosophy

History

Spiritual formation



## RCS is also called ***Transdisciplinary Scholarship***

RCS assumes that each discipline will require the collaboration of different specialists and will be a synthesis of 1) the disciplined study of some object by disciplinary specialists; 2) relevant biblical and theological work; 3) relevant philosophical and historical work; and 4) Christian spirituality

*So scholars within each discipline will need to be conversant with the metadisciplines and metadisciplinary scholars will be needed to help out in all disciplines*



## Working within Two Cities: A Two-Pronged Strategy

- Radical Christian Scholarship is based in the City of God
- Its vitality requires learning from, participating in, and contributing to the broader academic community.
- Christian scholars need a Christian hermeneutic to interpret and translate properly the texts of other worldview communities
- The City of God can best promote change in the public square by 1) becoming true to its new creation radicality; and 2) advocating genuine pluralism and dialogue, looking for opportunities to speak and live from a distinctly Christian orientation
- Respecting individual calling: some Christian scholars are called to work more in the City of God, others in the public square, and some in both



# Radical Christian Scholarship is Apocalyptic

- RCS is part of the breaking in to this age of the new creation in scholarship and education
- Part of the participation of believers in Christ's resurrection through union with him and communion with the triune God, as their knowing, loving, imagining, and living is being conformed to Christ's image

